

Channel 49
WITNESSES TO THE COMMITTEE

A story concerning the elicitation of the FACTS pertaining to the Guilty at the end of the World.

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A morbidly comic tale of unusual drama...

WITNESSES TO THE COMMITTEE

Shortly after the world collapsed under the weights of its absurdities, washed by the toxic cross-currents and eddies of its myriad inconsistencies the Committee convened in order to begin to set the Record straight.

As in the chaos before-there-was-light the Committee room was dark. It's total shape was unknown as its perceived frontiers ended at the dais. Illuminated, dimly among the shadows, sat a single witness' table with two chairs. From the unseen, before the witness-in-question straining to know the questioners, came the voices.

The Chairman's voice was loud and resonant, his manner stoically impartial. There was often fear in the psyches of the sensitive-ones that the Chairman showed no sympathy with the causes of those called before him. The Interrogator's voice, however, had other qualities. It was idiosyncratic, picking, glib, touching, caressing, textured-of-oddity, sometimes ingratiating, feigning friendship, emotive-supportive, coaxing, cajoling, asking for the trust and release of closely-held information. Many went forward in commitment to find solace and rest in this voice; to lay its burden and guilt there. But this voice could turn quickly, - escalating its demand for information in staccato, haranguing urgency, question after question all cross indexed brilliantly as a stainless-steel trap to snap shut on the taffy-of-puffery and bullshit concocted to smoke-screen the guilty from providing full revelation. This voice could pause, find comic exclamation, become angry, petulant, prejudicial and whining. If anything, however, it was a tireless voice.

Many early witnesses were called. A parade of minor drug-dealers, artists-of-deception, disordered thinking and psychopathic behavior. Several insisted on wearing sunglasses in the shadows, gave angry and confused half answers and acknowledged no point.

Leaning back in his chair L smirked at the Interrogator's voice and presented his middle finger in a counter salute.

The Chairman's voice erupted, filling the chamber with reverberation, causing an astute observer (if there had been one) to conclude that the chamber itself must be finite.

"The witness will gain nothing by strutting his ignorance before the Committee! You

will find no cheering section here."

L was taken back. His mind struggled for a legal point. "What Committee?"

"The Committee you ARE testifying before," the Interrogator said smugly.

"I don't SEE no Committee..."

"YOU ARE here, are you not?"

"Say what?" L reacted in anger. He sat up. Released a grin and went forward into the darkness with his hand out-stretched to feel a face. He became disoriented and fearful in the dark. Sheepishly he turned back to find the witness' table but was unable to locate that either. Minutes became interminable. Finally L cried out, "Where am I going?"

"Turn around half-way and proceed," the Interrogator said.

"You got more questions for me?" L asked.

"No."

L's hand felt a hard door. "You want I should go out?"

"Please."

Burdened by frightening trepidation he paused at this door. "I tell you what you like... He offered.

"It's no longer necessary," the Chairman boomed.

"Just open the door. Nothing on the other side of it will BITE you," the Interrogator chided.

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Professor MK was called as a friendly witness. He was allowed to go on at length of his evidences and anecdotes.

"...My response is that man is the creature of technology all of which becomes obsolete. Man is therefore the creature of garbage. Art is technology that does not function on a physical level, accomplishing anything definable; objective. Therefore art is technology that does not work.

"The understanding of God is the understanding of truth that is not yet known. This was mankind's greatest difficulty, this and his purpose under God, to transform from a disharmonious animal-existence to a harmonious, dignified existence. The technology outgrew the ability to use the technology. The technology almost transformed mankind but in the final analysis only hastened his downfall. --It was a failure of timing." Professor MK smiled wanly.

"Professor," the Interrogator began, "could reason have prevailed?"

"No. Entertainment prevailed. Reason is not a commodity of much worth..."

"But you made attempts to offer reason," the Interrogator offered.

"Of course! Even my little jokes ... When such serious minded people kept telling me that my classes weren't useful, that everyone should instead study computer science, I replied hopefully that, yes, the new wave of mathematical-logical novellas will become the new literature written from among the hosts of unemployed computer persons in a world too poor for mass-produced hamburgers and overburdened with useless information. I told them correctly that steel-reinforced concrete construction and, unfortunately, military infantry specialties were the most promising occupations of the near future..."

"And?"

"And you see the results."

"Yes, well, thank you Professor MK. Your testimony was delightful as usual.'

"The Chair reserves the right to recall the witness."

"That's fine with me, sir. I have nothing better to do and some time to do it in..."

Another friendly witness, 'Sully', a diminutive, intense fellow had prepared lengthy briefs for the Committee which he extended into the darkness. They seemed to be accepted and Sully muttered, "I don't know how you can read them, in this lack of lighting..."

Speaking from memory Sully proposed stinging accusations of conspiracy and evil against every segment of society. He burned with righteous rage. The Interrogator let him go on for some time.

"...This unbridled greed and carelessness in the name of every ideology that managed to justify itself ... it just provokes the imagination..."

"Yes, Mr. Sullivan, we are quite aware of it," the Interrogator said in a nearly friendly tone, avoiding all traces of sarcasm and few of condescension.

"It was abominable!" Sully removed his glasses and dabbed at his eyes. The Committee observed his genuine sorrow in absolute quiet.

*

Jack, the 'money manager' sat in effusive silence. He glanced hastily at his watch several times before realizing that time had stopped.

"Jack," the Interrogator asked, "tell us about the world that was money."

Jack frowned. "I'm in a hurry," Jack mentioned.

"Yes, we understand. You will be late for no appointment."

Jack smiled.

"--You can count on that," the Interrogator added. An edge of threat glistened from his words.

"What do you mean, the world of money?"

" Tall buildings in, oh..." The Interrogator paused for poetic effect, a city of tall buildings. Floor over floor in which thousands labor (he hung onto this word) if you can call it that (an auditory 'sneer'), to produce no product but profit. Expending money to directly 'produce' more money."

"What's wrong with that?" Jack asked with defensive sharpness.

"Have I said ..."

"--You've intimidated..."

"I've asked for YOUR description, yet you..."

"I sense a bias here!" Jack shouted.

The Chairman banged his gavel. "The witness is NOT to interrupt Counsel."

"Whose counsel? I don't even have a lawyer here. My rights are being violated," Jack protested.

"If needed, I shall act as your attorney. Proceed," the Chairman said.

The Interrogator began again, his voice purring. "Tell me about your world of money, Jack. Your world of expensive houses, exotic vacations, luxurious automobiles, security, seclusion and exclusivity. Explain to me the wonderful mathematics of more out of less. Since you manufactured no product for sale other than repackaged money into a bewildering number of new configurations, you replaced the need for the production of real products eliminating the need for jobs. How clever." The Interrogator's voice sunk to a brutal indictment, "How unproductive."

Jack said nothing. The silence built upon itself. His last fully coherent act was to re-examine his watch. Time had vanished. It was no longer. "What could I do?" He implored, overwhelmed by hysteria. "At least I didn't sell cancer."

"Oh, at times you did. We have here a prospectus for some 'tax-free' obligations known as 'mud-bonds'. Not only did it default, go 'belly-up' as was said in the trade, but upon its acreage was constructed a nice little development and a school. Under its acreage

was a toxic land-fill."

"I can't even remember it." Jack blurted.

"Indeed. What a deal it was; put together so quickly... A multiplicity of sins among many and committed haphazardly in 36 hours. In the old days it would take lifetimes to defraud and poison so many people. That's progress," the Interrogator zinged.

Jack blubbered on, timelessly, making his expensive suit sleeves soggy with snot. Apparently he'd gotten the idea that it didn't matter any more.

"In going over your records what really amazes me is your magazine subscription list. The subjects are so out-of-character with your mercantile demeanor; Army, Guns, Commando Incorporated. Did you fancy yourself a Wall Street Minute-Man? --You can be forgiven your falling in with bad company. The whole world was guilty of same but NOT," the Interrogator stressed, "for your latent fascination with militarism. After all you had your chance, earlier in life -- didn't you?"

Jack could make no response.

"Didn't YOU? Didn't you have your chance? Didn't you get over 20 extra years after evading your glorious chance? This smacks of having your cake and wanting ice cream too."

The Interrogator shifted into a gear of higher moral rectitude. "--Mr. Chairman, I'd like to call Wilson Jr. at this point. Wilson Jr. represents Jack's chance." Shifting into a mocking rebuke, he added, "He's the one who DIED in Jack's place."

"Very good Counsel do so," the Chairman affirmed.

Wilson appeared in raiment of his choosing, cheap summer weight slacks, an unattractive short-sleeve shirt with a loud geometric design. His hair was short, reddish, facial features lost amid flesh that wasn't lean. His feet were encased in black, military 'low quarters;' round toed, plain, laced shoes. His socks, short black and cotton. To those around him he was ageless, indeterminable when he stepped on his mine. To the Committee he was nineteen. His nose ran and he was dressed as he was for his R.&R. trip to Bangkok, Thailand. His last joyous memory was a drunken revelry diminishing into blackout as he was carried or almost carried by two buddies either into or out of a modern, Thai bowling alley. It was all very vague.

He wiped at his nose.

"Do you remember the end?" The Interrogator asked.

"No." He'd rather remember Thailand. There was this girl...

"Nothing?"

The explosion was background vibrations. A gush of ringing in his ears. No. Yes. He could remember the quiet after-moment when the recognition sunk in. Yes it

happened. It happened to me. Oh sorrow, to leave from this awful spot. Want to talk to Ma. Be comforted by her soft hands. I want Ma to hold me. Ben is holding me. Doc is patting me. The Lieutenant pokes his head into this closing vision. He smiles for me, holds my arm. They are Ma. No they aren't. Yes, Ben is Ma, now... I want my Ma to talk to...I want to tell her I'm sorry that... He opened his mouth and ... that was it. Floating up out of the jungle clearing, wafting higher ... Still down with Ben. Doc pushing his chest. The Lieutenant squeezing his arm. No feeling in that arm. Lifeless. They lay his head back and closed his eyes.

"I can remember only a few seconds worth." Wilson volunteered.

"You enlisted. Why did you do it.?" The Interrogator asked.

Wilson rubbed his head. "Thought I was supposed to. They'd a gotten me anyway, sooner or later... "

"How do you feel about getting killed at nineteen?"

"I figured it might be coming. That's why I acted up in Bangkok. I got pretty mean there. Drank too much. The Padre absolved me."

"The Padre?"

"Father... I can't remember his name. A Navy Chaplain. He heard my confession before I went back to the bush. Maybe I was daydreaming there. Not careful..."

"He said it was all right ... to be killed at Nineteen?"

"Well ... You know for God...Christ and my country. He blessed me."

"He did? And you can't remember his name?"

"No."

"Would he remember yours?"

Wilson thought. "Probably not."

"Why?"

Wilson snickered. "There were a lot of us, with pretty much the same thing to say. All kinda scared. Taken' communion, it was an outdoor mass ... in a light rain ... a drizzle..."

"If he can't remember you than why would it mean anything?" The Interrogator questioned.

"You mean it don't?"

"I'm asking you. If he could take note of you; it might make a difference, don't you

think?"

'Jeeze, I don't know. I did what I was supposed to... I took the rosary they handed out... I took the host right from his hands. There was rain on my face, it hid the tears."

The Interrogator seemed moved. His voice was thick. "Mr. Chairman, can the Committee locate this exact Chaplain?"

"Yes."

"May we call him as our next witness?"

"You may."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman," the Interrogator said. "I have no more specific questions for this witness... But... Maybe he has something further to enlighten us about... Something to say..."

Wilson Jr. shrugged. "An instant ago I was 19. More than twenty years ago... I can't really understand it... I only loved two or three girls. And I didn't really love them or even know them very well. I suppose... If the Chaplain didn't want to know me; to... uh... I..."

"You can say it here," the Interrogator whispered.

"--Love me... Well..." Wilson choked up. "My Ma loved me." He cried. "Maybe nobody else..." He struggled at recovery, sitting stiffly in his foolish outfit, "No I guess it wasn't fair... But I'm not really mad. I'm not sure what would have become of me anyway..." he admitted tearfully.

"You would have been miserable like almost everyone else. But quiet misery, even desperation in your hot, little bungalow with peeling paint, on those itchy, humid lowlands is superior to being exploded in an unpronounceable place eleven months after your high school prom. And if you're not mad, I'm pissed for you."

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The Chaplain, retired as a Naval Reserve Lt. Commander and later as a Bishop of his Church, sat at quiet attention as the Interrogator prepared his notes.

"Commander Connor?"

"Yes..."

"Are you comfortable with that title, or would you prefer Bishop... Reverend?"

"Father?" The former Chaplain asked, hopefully.

"Not my father..." the Interrogator muttered.

"What was that, sir?"

"Nothing. The matter-in-question relates to your military service, therefore I believe it appropriate to address you accordingly..."

"But..."

"You had the rank. You retired..."

"Yes, but..."

"I'd prefer it that way."

"I feel that... Is there some appeal I may make?" The former Chaplain asked.

"You may state your appeal to me," the Chairman announced, startling the witness.

"Yes sir... The point I'd like to make... You see, even while I was in uniform my duties... my devotion was to matters of faith and therefore..."

"Mr. Chairman may I intervene at precisely this junction," the Interrogator interjected. "My thrust is to establish whether matters of religious faith can indeed BE co-mingled with an undertaking such as military combat and its institutions."

"Thank you, sir. Proceed," the Chairman instructed.

"I believe that, uh... was it Julius II who said, 'I'm no scholar, give me a sword?'..." The Interrogator joked snidely.

"I don't understand." The Chaplain commented of the remark.

"You may use it as an evidential statement in your behalf. of course, I warn you, Church history may not be used as precedent in these proceedings. There's enough mayhem and vulgarity in Church History to blemish a tart."

"Proceed, sir," the Chairman urged.

"Yes. I apologize Mr. Chairman. Commander Connor, please tell us of the confession and communion you administered in a field-service... a mass, to Pvt. George Wilson Jr. on or about October 10th 1969. It was raining."

"I uh..." The retired Chaplain was taken back. There was silence. "Uh...what do you... I can't..." Connor faltered.

"Well... for instance what did Pvt. Wilson confess to?" The Interrogator pressed.

"I can't! Priest-penitent--"

"Isn't it a fact that you can't remember"

"I can not disclose ..."

"Commander Connor!" The Interrogator shouted but then retreated to solicitous quiet. He snickered softly with a threatening whimsy. "Commander Connor I think you should be aware of the mandate and scope of this Committee."

"To disclose information gotten as a result of priest-penitent privilege?" Connor asked with incredulous disbelief.

"To disclose what transpired in your mother's womb if there is a pertinent fact in there... We have full and complete authority to make judgment here," the Interrogator added.

"But?"

"Any and all pertinent facts ARE relevant."

"Mr. Chairman can this be true?" Connor inquired.

"It is."

"Very well." Connor said with resignation. "What is it you have to know?"

"Private George Wilson Jr.'s confession. He had just returned from R. & R. and had some trivial but juicy little tidbits to offer. Some minor wickedness that I'm sure he felt duty-bound to share."

"Such as?"

"Oh... Fornication. Perhaps a fist-fight. Shoving a prostitute. Drunkenness. Is that a sin; drunkenness? My dictionary doesn't say..."

"I'm to remember this?" Connor asked with confusion.

"October 1969. It was raining."

"I've heard thousands of confessions. Tens of thousands."

"With fornication?"

"Yes!"

"Drunkenness? Disorderly behavior, sloth?"

"Of course!"

"What an unruly flock you have."

Connor's eyebrows furrowed with hostility. "This is what goes on."

"I'm sure. It sounds like good business. Outlaw fucking, issue summonses and then collect the fees. Sounds like the statutory situation in some Latin American country. It sounds like corruption!"

"Not to me!" Connor said with vehemence.

"Then again you don't partake; or do you?"

"Uh..."

"Don't answer that. I withdraw the question. We here on this Committee are not interested in the historicity of most random or planned ejaculations, in and of themselves, any more than we are concerned with the path of a slug over a fallen leaf. -- okay, we have established that you have heard ten thousand confessions of non-countenanced copulation. But not all in October 1969?"

"Who can remember October 1969?" Connor shouted.

"It was a field mass in the fucking rain!" The Interrogator shouted back. "Among teenage boys scared out of their wits that within hours they would have pieces of themselves showered into the trees! Why can't you remember that? In the rain!"

The Chaplain bowed his head into both hands. He ran his fingers through the gray bushing up from his scalp. Considering his age, he had a nice head of hair.

"I can't remember. Even if I could, I can not remember a George Willis."

"WILSON! Private George Wilson Jr."

"I can't remember this particular marine."

"In days, Commander, he was DEAD!"

"Oh God. I'm sorry."

"Sorry doesn't mean shit. Commander Connor does your religion sanctify killing? No, that is a foolish question. Does your religion, in modern times, teach that killing is a devotion of the faith?"

"Of course not. That question is absurd!"

"Not really," the Interrogator said.

"We have Jesus' words. Turn the other cheek, love your enemies, the Golden Rule..."

"--I come as a sword."

"What?" Connor asked.

"We won't debate what is commonly known as scripture. Though if I may comment, scripture can be quoted to anyone's conclusion. Your statement then, is that your religion does not maintain killing as a ... a sacrament for instance?"

"Of course not. That's blaspheme!" The Chaplain said strongly.

"Hold on. Don't make accusations," the Interrogator counseled, "How is killing regarded by your religion? Your order. Your devotion as you put it?"

"...Ordinarily..."

"--You make distinctions? When to turn the other cheek? Which enemy to love?"

"I thought we weren't going to debate that."

The Interrogator laughed. "You caught me. Perhaps you missed your true calling. You should have been an attorney. Disregard that. --Is it not true that killing is regarded as sinful?"

"Yes."

"Then what the hell we're you doing in the field!?" The Interrogator thundered.

"Faith. Providing faith and comfort..."

"What good did it do?"

"You see, sir, we in my faith believe ..."

"--In pragmatically kissing blessings upon the dumbly-doomed. Making no waves. Letting malevolent history take its ugly course," the Interrogator stated.

"No. In eternal life!"

"Cut me a break."

"--Bestowed upon..."

"Please, Commander."

"--With belief in..."

"Enough."

"Our Lord and Savior."

"Did you or did you not wear a military uniform with an officer's insignia on it?"

"Yes. It was required." The Chaplain explained.

"Weren't you, in fact, sanctifying martial combat?"

"Mr. ... Sir, I will not argue the merits of that conflict. But do you not believe that at times a nation has a right to defense?"

"Whoa-Ho," the Interrogator chuckled. His voice leaned close to the microphone and issued forth with a low and provocative rumble. "We are not discussing what I believe; but what YOU do."

"What are you saying?" Connor asked.

"You were a credible symbol of higher authority to a kid like Wilson Jr.. You and his football coach, and gym teacher and boy-scout leader led him forward to do his 'duty'. You must bear some of the blame in that. God and country is not God-in-country, or country-in-God."

"Sometimes it may be." Connor offered.

"This can not be proven."

"I believe it. --Wasn't something accomplished in that conflict. Something intangible perhaps?"

"Hmmm. Something positive? Let me check the record here. It'll take a moment. The record on this 'little' war is voluminous. Hmmm, maybe... Nope. Major Hua was unable to save the refrigerator he purchased with illicit funds. It was lost during the final retreat. He wasn't able to save his neck either."

"All negative?"

"Somewhere a child was born that wouldn't have been. Maybe you can relate to that. How much love this child felt may be another story. But the balance sheet is clear. Much more went to the worms prematurely than was made fresh. That's the record, Commander."

"I don't know the record. All I know is the truth and his name is Jesus Christ."

"And he shall testify," the Interrogator stated.

"Mr. Chairman, I would like to call the Intercessor, if I may?" The Interrogator asked.

"You may have trouble with that," the Chairman mentioned.

"Why is that, sir?" The Interrogator replied.

"Which one?"

The Interrogator laughed softly.

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Three were called. The first was an energetic, fiercely intelligent Rabbi Yeshua. The second a brooding, hypnotic-eyed slender man with deeply scarred flesh who wore only a loin cloth. His name was Christ. The third was a very handsome, pleasantly featured man flush with radiance. He had the eyes of a woman; specifically a woman-in-love or full of mischievous tease. This last one, called Lord, did not speak.

"Rabbi Yeshua," the Interrogator began, addressing the only one of the three to seat himself, "have you read the testimony of the previous witness?"

"I have, in Aramaic though."

"How would you respond?"

"That this man be guilty of being less than God," the Rabbi answered.

"Please explain if you would."

"Reverend Connor did not make the world. I assume on his behalf that he attempted to do justly in it. That he may have failed at being enlightened is not particularly his fault."

"Whose fault is it?" The Interrogator asked.

"Equally yours." The Rabbi answered.

The Interrogator reacted with surprise. "Mine?"

"You were not there to question him carefully when he needed it."

"That's out-of-order," the Interrogator stated. "One doesn't blame the transgressions of man upon God; or does one?"

"A good question."

"Indeed. If I may attempt to impugn your testimony, Rabbi, --are you now or have you ever said that you, in a special way, are the only son of God. And if so how did you mean that?"

The Rabbi chuckled. "If you already have the evidence in all matters, why seek it from my mouth?"

"Because Rabbi, truth is of no value unless it is understood to BE the truth. Consider this line of questioning for its educational value."

"Very well. I declare myself to be only your humble servant."

"Can you see the incongruity and potential for culpability in such representation between the ways-of-righteousness and the conscription and forced mortality of very young men in dubious combat?" The Interrogator asked.

"I do. I do not defend his institution."

"But you with-hold from Chaplain Connor his ability to distinguish right from wrong?"

"It's all quite relative Mr. Interrogator. After all, not so very long ago, Reverend Connor's institution was itself involved in dubious combat and capital punishment for crimes of metaphysical trespass. Given such, I find Reverend Connor's actions to be an improvement over the past."

"Mr. Christ can you add any light to this discussion?" The Interrogator asked.

"I am the way. Priest Connor is the way unto me, and I unto the Father."

"I don't believe you're speaking to the issue here."

"I am the issue. For because of me, men-of-no-faith shall not know peace."

"Mr. Chairman can we find this witness in contempt for psychotic babble?" The Interrogator asked.

"Listen closely, sir, before you make such a finding," the Chairman counseled.

"Mr. Christ, are you, in fact, or have you ever been believed to be insane?" The Interrogator questioned.

"I have. I am not. I am of a different world."

"Mr. Lord, do you have anything to add here?" The Interrogator asked of the third witness.

Lord smiled serenely, bowed his head with great shyness and looked up toward the Interrogator with eyes brimming wet.

Boy, you would play good on television," the Interrogator noted.

"--Rabbi Yeshua, I shall graciously consider you to be a friendly witness before this Committee and as such do you have a summation? Some remarks you wish to share with us?"

"I believe I do."

"Go ahead, Rabbi."

"Thank you. The issue is understanding. Understanding requires empathy which we define as a form of love; for empathy involves identification of another as one's-self. This identification is symbolic of a higher affection..."

"I hope you are not going to lose me in a Rabbinical parable here, sir," the Interrogator cut in.

"No. Not at all. Simply, you have to put yourself in Chaplain Connor's place. It's not a place I would choose to go, but I am not he. I find it difficult to judge him based on my own assumptions."

"I don't."

"Then please take mercy," Rabbi Yeshua asked.

"Thank you, sir. You are all three-of-you excused."

Rabbi Yeshua rose and touched Christ's arm in order to gain his attention and motion him away. Then he lifted up Lord who had become a glossy, color, cut-out poster on a cardboard stand and gently carried him away as Christ followed.

*

Sully sat stiffly before the Committee and read a statement quietly: "I urge the Committee, respectfully, that it bring the full weight of inquiry down upon the transgressors who should have known better..." He took his glasses off and looked into the darkness where the Interrogator's voice waited with reserve.

"--I came to love a woman..." Sully said, "a good woman, who had previously married... Without going into too much detail let me just say that the result of such an involvement had dire consequences upon me and my family. In fact, sir... my mother's death, I believe, was due to this ... If we take one measure against wrong that does us wrong, then sir, I feel we must take two measures upon that which pretends to speak goodness and does wrong..."

Sully paused, cleaned his glasses and wiped at his eyes. "Jesus once said that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. I believe this to be true... I also believe that the Church was made for man and not man for the Church. Thank you, sir."

"And thank you Mr. Sullivan," the Interrogator offered allowing a silence as Sully gathered his materials before departing the witness' table.

*

The Interrogator swore in a recently departed former President. He was a jovial man wearing the impeccable blue suit he was buried in. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

The ex-President grinned. "What if I don't know the truth?" He chuckled.

"You know what you know, don't you?"

"Oh, I might know what I think I know, or think I know what I know even if I don't know it for a fact. Then again, maybe I don't know anything." He smiled.

"Just sit down," the Interrogator said, tiredly.

The ex-President sat. "See, I always figured the truth is what should be," he said.

"How can you deal with reality without working factually with what is, what exists?"
The Interrogator asked.

"Oh, I never dealt with reality." The ex-President chuckled. "There were other people to do that. My strong point was always to deal ... or talk about what should be. That's how I got elected."

"Sir, let me ask an important question."

"Certainly. You go right ahead."

"Do you believe in television?" The Interrogator asked.

"Yes, I do. I might add that I have a very strong belief, a firm belief in television."

"My next question, sir, is this: Is there reality beyond television?"

The ex-President grew concerned. "I'm afraid I don't understand the question."

"Can something be true; i.e. valid and NOT, I repeat, NOT be on television?"

"--Gosh. That really throws me for a loop. Uh... let me think that over... True and not on television? No, I don't think so."

"Tell me sir," Pressed the Interrogator. "You spent a great deal of time on television, did you not?"

"I most certainly did." The ex-President admitted, proudly.

"So you were most real, were you not?"

"Well, I guess I was. I musta been."

"And being very real gives you responsibility; a great deal of responsibility for the calamities that followed your administration; that existed in embryonic form prior to your administration..."

"Hold on there! Embryonic form? Whoa, Mr. You must know my stand on abortion..."

"Mr. ex-President, having been most-real; and presumed to be responsible; are you not responsible?"

"No! Oh no. You see," he laughed. "What's on television is not the way things may work out."

"Sir, I believe you're arguing both sides of the point."

"I am? Gee, I didn't think I was that smart. There's probably many sides to that point. MY side is the RIGHT one."

"O.K. let's get down to business here. I have a mountain of depositions here... some on unrecoverable debt ... dissolution of real industry... inept design strategy and corrupt purchase practices for the armed forces and other agencies of government. What we have here is a bizarre web of countervailing, contravening policies ... I don't feel like dealing with any of it."

"That's good. Because neither do I." The ex-President joked with rosy humor. A most charming fellow.

"Mr. ex-President I'd like to deal with the case of Airman Bryon Tolby. He was 18 years old, some-what overweight and died of supposedly unknown causes while attempting-under-duress to complete the so-called confidence course in basic training. So much for confidence."

"Gee, that's too bad."

"I have here a record of his final thoughts a few moments before he collapsed. The obscenities in large letters interspersed among his thoughts are presumed, in fact it is known, to be the exhortations of his Training Instructor, Sergeant Gruel."

A copy was delivered to the ex-President who put his reading glasses on. "Oh my, 'You homo-faggott, get your lard-ass girl's butt over that post. You layen' down on me, boy. C'mon, pussy, get it over, or you won't be welcome in my house.' Colorful ..."

"Very. Please read Airman Tolby's final thoughts. The pathos is unmistakable. The lowliness, the self-loathing, the anxiety and desperation of the boy just reaches out, does it not?" The Interrogator inquired.

"Yes it does. A shame. I hope a hearty condolence was sent to his parents."

"Mr. ex-President, are you not in some way responsible? Bryon had a coronary irregularity, coupled to heat-stroke. A pulse stammering under the condition of acute anxiety. Wasn't his untimely and disgraceful death your responsibility as Commander-in-Chief?"

"No. You see, I was only ELECTED. This Sergeant was responsible because he was appointed, therefore he had a job he understood; I didn't. In fact, I don't know anything about this and wouldn't want to."

"Several months after this incident Sergeant Gruel divorced his wife of one year, Anita, took to a charismatic religious order and under the influence of a bottle of Shopping Center Bourbon renovated his entire head with a .357 magnum pistol at a distance of one inch. Exactly who should we fix the blame on?"

"The system."

"Precisely," purred the Interrogator, "That's why I would like very much to pin this to your ass. And I'd like to add that happenings such as this Tolby-case are much more frequent than we'd like to admit."

"Why me?" The ex-President questioned. "What about the supervisory personnel?"

"The supervisory personnel were themselves unsupervised. As those who voted for you bear responsibility for you, you bear responsibility for them. The highest-of-the-high must always take responsibility for the lowest-of-the-low," the Interrogator said.

"Why?"

"Because no one else will. And intense misery of this magnitude requires that it be compensated with regal satisfaction. So this baby is all yours, partner."

"Shit!" The ex-President cursed. "A half billion out of work. Carcinogens everywhere. A world in ruin. Countless are doomed and I get stuck with nickel and dime crap like this!"

"And you'll pay for it too," the Interrogator cooed with mendacious glee.

"It's not fair!" The ex-President protested. "A miserable fat-puke wimp dies in a training accident, peeing in his pants and I got to take the rap. Shit! Why can't you give me a hero?" He shouted, "Some glorious, vibrant lad with steely eyes going forth posthumously to glory; into the blaze of machine-gun fire. Shooting from the hip, killing countless of the enemy. Dying cleanly with freedom on his lips --in some mistaken, useless war that time and clever diplomacy might have avoided? Why can't I, at least, carry that obligation instead?"

"Sorry. You have to take what you get."

"It's not FAIR!" The ex-President implored, fighting the great hurt of this impropriety.

"You are dismissed," the Interrogator announced moments before the lights went off forcing the former Chief-of-State and Commander-in-Chief to stumble helplessly in the stygian darkness.

*

Sully addressed the Committee: "It is apparent that power and its processes are concerned with two issues. The first is Control & Confrontation; the second is Allocation of resources..."

The Interrogator interrupted. "That sounds like war and possibly law-enforcement, and the second is mammon; money."

"I believe that my criteria are somewhat broader, but if you like..."

"No, no. I like yours better. Please continue Mr. Sullivan."

"Thank you. As any observant person can notice, these two issues are quite inter-related. I would also state that Justice; and not the process of justice, but true justice is something that may or may not occur between the cracks. Its occurrence is based more on luck than any other objective factor." Sully drew in a slight breath. His face contorted as he weighed his bitter conclusions. "It seems to me, sir, that the tools and victims of the former..."

"--Control and confrontation?"

"Yes. --Are most often not the recipients of the latter..."

"Largess and its favors," the Interrogator said.

"Yes sir."

"Mr. Sullivan you are now in league with the Philosopher Socrates and the Prophet Amos. They advanced similar conclusions. Socrates was forced to commit suicide and I'm uncertain what became of Amos," the Interrogator said.

"And?..." Prompted the Chairman.

"Oh there have been others. Many others. Numbers of writers touched down here... Dostoevsky, Kafka. This knowledge is certainly no secret. Even Jesus made some note of this incongruity... though I'd like to keep that off the record if I may as we... a..."

"You may continue," the Chairman said.

"Certainly."

"Why?" Sullivan asked.

"Why, --you ask?"

"Yes, why?"

"Oh..." the Interrogator said with a lengthy gasp. "I think our next witness could enlighten us a bit on that... Mr. Sullivan let me just leave you with this note..." The Interrogator suppressed some frivolity in his voice, "You can't serve God and Mammon (money) though it seems that so many want to try."

*

Professor MK spoke: "I noticed from the transcript that you've taken some of Mr. Sullivan's concerns to heart and linked two victims of the policy-of-confrontation to identifiable symbols-of-authority... Two similar victims to three dissimilar symbols; business, religion and government --all of whom seem to co-exist rather neatly..."

"War and money make for strange bedfellows," the Interrogator replied. "But I must admit that we have far too many victims and not quite enough time to cover them all. We are grinding our investigation toward the inevitable halt and want your thoughts on

several matters. I believe you can help tie this package up."

"Such as?" MK asked.

"Let's start with the Chaplain and his world. Mr. Sullivan had an especially poignant plea in that regard..."

"I sympathize strongly with Mr. Sullivan." Professor MK admitted. "But it's too easy to take a simple Chaplain, a believer, a man stuck inside a cookie where it's sweet and say, 'look, all around this cookie is rottenness, why didn't someone clean it up?' This is the obvious comment; and every 20 years some well-intentioned observer repeats it, and then saunters off..."

"Is this testimony in defense of Commander Connor?" The Interrogator inquired.

"No. I'm not defending him as such... But it's harder to understand the Chaplain, the parishioner, the cookies, the intoxicating sugars of life, the fermenting rottenness and to realize that in our own small way we are always fashioning each ingredient to this brew. Knowing this is the difficulty; changing this is the challenge."

"What then of Mr. Sullivan's pleas for two measures against wrong that parades as right?"

"... Let me instead address Mr. Sullivan's two stated areas of concern. I think those broad and inclusive sets of criteria are worthy of some explanation..."

"Alright, go ahead, sir," the Interrogator said.

"Number one: We make heroes for ourselves that support our instincts for aggrandizement. Not always a material aggrandizement, it could be 'spiritual' too, but, it speeds us toward totality. Thus, this need for a universalism-in-ideology can be our most cursing desire. Our heroes become our culture. And the inconsistency of our greatest heroism is this: Seditious revolutionaries become paragons of future orthodoxies. --How many of the wisest who said in their day, 'take not of some-one else but give.' have come down to us idolized with the screams of billions shouting 'take-take-take; make-make-make, all-all-all give-give-give.'"

"It'll take me a minute to digest that, but it sounds plausible," the Interrogator said.

"Shall I continue?"

"Yes, please."

"Number two: Allocations are based on how favorably it impacts the allocator," Professor MK smiled. "What's called an ideology-of-allocation is simply the amalgam of previous customs of allocation. Nowhere is there a 'system'. There are only philosophies-of-systems. Humanity refuses to look too closely. It doesn't want to know, --until the thing is broken. Then of course it's too late and the process begins all over starting with new heroes, customs and so forth. I don't want to get into cycle-theory, so I've left out the time-formula."

"Interesting. What makes you try so hard at understanding?" The Interrogator asked.

The Professor laughed. It was a self-effacing laugh. "Because I do not always understand myself; that's why I work at understanding the world around me."

"Are you certain..."

"--Of course. Why else would I have occupied myself as a browser in someone else's bookstore these last few years? I sometimes feel like a lone terrorist treading water in the sea lanes attempting to sink randomly passing ships with my lunacy and my turban."

"Let the record state that you do not wear a turban."

"It was a figure of speech. A hat would come off in the water."

"Not if it fit properly," the Interrogator said, "I must state the record carefully Professor. Because the record can not see."

"Very well... You know, Mr. Interrogator, I must confess I have often longed for those things I condemn in others."

"But you haven't pursued them."

"Out of laziness only. It's easier to pursue thought and fantasy, and that's why we people are so inconsistent as a species."

"Why is that?"

"There is no profit in pure knowledge and wisdom. Reason is employed by mankind toward the accomplishment of relatively short-term objectives."

"You have mentioned spirituality..."

"It's innate. We have this ability to sit beside a rock and intuitively feel a link to the divine. These rocks are worn smooth with the kisses of tens of millions."

"And your analysis of that?"

Professor MK shrugged. "At least while we're kissing the rock we're not murdering each other. The real work of the divine, as I might have stated in earlier testimony, is less glamorous. It's like a marriage after the initial infatuation has worn thin. Passion gets diluted in laundry water."

"Who are we married to?"

"Each other, of course."

"Thank you Professor for that discourse."

"Was it too long?"

"If I didn't want to hear it, believe me, I would have stopped you," the Interrogator said.

The Chairman laughed briefly.

"As you know," the Interrogator continued, "It is my job to elicit as many facets of the truth as possible. I'm not sure that you fully addressed my question, though. In any regard, getting back to the genre of Commander Connor please extend to me your evaluation of the predominate Religion in Western Culture."

The Professor grinned. "Will I live long enough to finish?"

The Interrogator snickered and the Chairman tapped his gavel gently.

"That information is classified and only available in executive session. You may be brief," the Interrogator answered.

"An evaluation... Ooo-boy. Let me skip the first 2000 years..."

The Interrogator laughed.

"I would say," Professor MK began, "that at its best it represented an effort at unification across many nationalities into a more singular motif. This touches upon my remarks earlier about aggrandizement... Oddly enough we have a mixture of elements here that one would not ordinarily equate with power in the world. Its theology is morbidly other-world-oriented. It's tri-embodiment of God into God, mystery and God/man/God is not something I'm able to get a good handle on, any more then the concept of sin as a defect that can be neutralized by a magical formula. Its appeal, rather than calling for unity represents the want for a personal, private, individual and mystical salvation. I suppose that one reason for its overwhelming success is that it's so easy to believe in and so impossible to understand. --Always remember, however, that celebrants are not theologians, otherwise religion would not likely exist. Can you imagine a laity of theologians?"

MK paused. "I think personal revelation is possible but not permanent-personal salvation. Either truth is universal or it isn't truth. Formula can not supersede truth... What bothers me most is not that people need to blow a smoke-screen in front of themselves, but the Divine Comedy; the irony of existence without understood meaning ..."

MK said nothing for several seconds hoping perhaps for a refutation from the dark. None came and he continued. "--Let's leave this theology for a moment. It's mostly in books anyway. There is always a greater if more frightening reality."

"Television?" The Interrogator asked facetiously.

"No. One need not go into the corporate boardrooms restricted caucuses, or military

training camps to ascertain the true faith of the Nations. All one has to do is drive cautiously on the busy highways of metropolitan areas. --There you see... How striking a number perform their creed. The golden rule by which they live; their inner belief is 'ME FIRST, ASSHOLE; FUCK YOU!'"

The Interrogator exploded into laughter. "Professor MK you've outdone yourself!"

"A clever vulgarity is always more palatable than dry analysis." Professor MK admitted. "This reminds me of a story about the chimp originally involved in one of those non-verbal language studies. This chimp was very bright. He mastered 700 words of the English language. His name was Bingo. He couldn't vocalize but learned how to type. -- One day when his trainer was off Bingo sat down at his typewriter and polished off a television script. He got an agent who submitted the script to a major network. The network reviewed the script favorably but with-regret informed the agent that, though the material was fresh and interesting, it was too far above the heads and tastes of the viewers.

"The chimp was not terribly disappointed; his girlfriend didn't watch television. So, Bingo increased his vocabulary and became a lawyer. I've corresponded with him, and this is why I relate the story. Remember he is not a human and understands things differently... He acknowledges no supreme deity but does regard there to exist a metaphysical duality, good luck and bad luck. He is not convinced that death is inevitable but that slavery or captivity is. So, I'm not sure if that makes him a pessimist or an optimist. He's a most interesting fellow. Recently Bingo was working for the collection department of a multinational bank..."

"Is this true, or are you just pandering to my sense of the absurd?" The Interrogator asked.

The Professor chuckled. "Who knows ... To return to seriousness: --On the one hand some of mankind is vicious; like beasts. Others merely powerful. The innocent I liken to mice. None are saintly. The male is bigger than the female. They both take their instinctive pleasures. They survive on the small bounties of serendipity. They live as all creatures do, to procreate. They are fearful and by no means intending on harm. Yet, by their nature they produce spoilage. Their garbage soils the landscape. With no intellectual intent they prowl the Almighty's kitchen, nibble his fruits, poke their sniffing faces forward to taste the Powerful One's bait. SNAP!" MK slapped his hand down on the witness' table. "Down comes the loaded trap, Smashing them practically in two, genitalia extended, uterus bulging with the unborn... Such are the innocent, committing sin by living. Running afoul of greater purpose and finding their instincts pure ruination. Their happiness halted abruptly and their young poisoned and murdered. I'm sure it makes some sort of sense but I recoil at discovering it. Why? Because, unfortunately, I too am a mouse..."

"Let the record show that Professor MK is human," the Interrogator stated. "Was that last allegory meant as a challenge to this Committee? Regardless. --Please continue... If you wouldn't mind stating such; what are your personal habits in this 'spiritual' realm?"

The professor considered the request. "I do not worship, but I do pray. I pray because

I'm weak and I must remind myself of this; celebrate it. In the face of this utterly powerful universe I pray to the God of my conscience to whom all people should owe their social and moral contract. From this perception of a moral contract, a covenant, comes the hope of a human dignity; other wise we're left only with bullshit. So praying is nothing to be ashamed of. It makes my conscience the world for a split-instant and briefly redeems me from total and profound absurdity.

--That the nature of God is unknowable is a fact of all existence; that Jesus is not provable is also a fact and no dilemma connects the two because the latter becomes irrelevant in the face of the former.

"Yet, I rather like Jesus. When I need my God I connect with others who have done likewise, such as he."

"I'm touched by your eloquence. Yet something is still missing..." the Interrogator said.

"Statements alone can not always conjure up the entire vision."

"True..."

"If you're willing to suffer my meanderings, I'll attempt a different avenue..."

"Professor, me-thinks you meander with pre-meditation. Continue," the Interrogator said.

"Let me try this ... I'm going to tell you a story in dream images. Pastels and shadows. This is a psychotic tale, a frightening nightmare the way only a dream can be, with no evocative monstrosity, just implication..."

--There is a porcelain house. Modern 50's deco. It is faddishly new and by now becoming old. The house is two stories. Bizarre. Hidden by the fronds of its trees. It is both impenetrable and inviting. The atmosphere is timeless. Long dusk or bright night, obscured with the haze of memory like an intoxicant. --Yet shadows fall so sharp they appear likke zebra stripes. There is a demarcation here, though we do not know of what. The front of the house sits in a neighborhood of a city. A city so immense that one could run for a thousand nights along myriad byways and still have streets to search knowing nothing but other unknowable streets, cluttered closely with block upon block of dwellings, some tiny, others expansive. There is so much habitation, so many buildings--often encroaching decay --that the porcelain house is barely recognizable as a home, just a point obscured by so many other points. There are so many possibilities, some cruelly voluptuous, and no-invitation-to-any-of-them. This huge city is the metropolis of sheer loneliness.

"From the back door of the house... --Ah, from the back door, a yard that may have once been a cultivated farm gives way amid twisted, fallen trees to fields and forests stretching off countless miles to an unseen horizon. There are no options, and from one hill the view is remarkably similar to any other hill. The emptiness continuing forever is terrifying."

The Professor paused. "So there you have the two states of mankind; relative value

and limited value. Too many options and not enough options. The alienation of the multitude and the friendlessness of the wilderness. There is love and no love, attachment and estrangement, a relationship stretched too far apart and withered or one too close and smothered to nothing. In mankind there is no, and has never been, equilibrium; not as a continuum, only as a brief point in the movement past it. I believe mathematics and science teach us this.

"Inspecting man's arsenals, his bank accounts, his libraries overstocked with the mundane and poorly circulated of reason will not give you your final answer of his nature. Goodness would be nice but the issue here is LUCK. -How can separate beings freely agree on a single universal reason WITHOUT a shared enlightenment? Where is this reason-of-man, this logos, coming down from the clouds in power and glory that we were to WAIT for? --Man's progress simply outpaced his short-term abilities to handle it. --The truth of the matter is; it could have gone either way... --It could have just barely worked. This then is my plea; and my indictment."

The Interrogator's voice waited a beat. "Is that, uh, Professor MK or 'Rabbi' MK?" He chided.

The Chairman smacked his gavel down and the Interrogator picked up his words quickly. "How can I make heads or tails ... or heads or t-a-l-e-s out of this story? --This parable is so involved with psychological imagery that like your city it's unknowable."

"Exactly."

"Oh... So I get it after all," the Interrogator said, "It could have gone either way, huh? But it can't go both ways and it didn't go either. --What am I going to do with this testimony? The Chaplain says, more or less, 'forgive us for what we don't know and don't want to know.' The ex-President says, 'I was only following orders and can't be held responsible.' And the money manager says, 'Forgive me because everybody else was doing it.' Sullivan calls upon us to punish transgressors and you... Your testimony says, 'Forgive us our folly because we are mankind.' --Is this mankind's answer to responsibility; we-are-name-is-folly? --Bless us with evasion through ignorance?"

"I didn't think," MK said, "that I was making any excuses. I thought you wanted an explanation, that obviously by now you've arrived at your own indictments."

"Mr. Chairman, sir?" The Interrogator called.

For a moment it seemed that the Chair had stepped away but shortly his voice spoke through the darkness. "I think we can strike your conclusion of the Professor's summation. Perhaps it cut a little too close to the bone... It's getting late, how soon till we can finish Mr. Interrogator?" The Chairman asked.

"I will recall Mr. Sullivan for a final time. We shall be done very soon Mr. Chairman."

"Proceed."

"Thank you. Professor MK I apologize for any hasty conclusions on my part. But, be aware sir, that the Arcanum city in question has been man's city."

"I understand. --And it's God's wilderness that is barely habitable."

"I won't comment on that. I wish you well, sir," the Interrogator said.

"Thank You." Professor MK replied.

"Mr. Chairman, we've heard some interesting witnesses. Some of whom have provided great elucidation upon the motives of mankind. I recommend that these few personages be accorded the honorary status of 'Recognized-Friends-of-the-Committee' as they wander the rest of their days in the void of this empty world."

"It is so ordered." The Chair ruled.

"It's the least we can do," the Interrogator added.

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Sully read his short statement, his fingers tremulous with the stubby note card: "... And though I sought incriminating charges against the unfairness, I would like to ask, respectfully of the Committee, when and by what process will a better world will be re-given to us?"

There was silence.

"Mr. Sullivan," the Interrogator said, "the Chairman has agreed to honor you and a few others as Friends of the Committee ..."

"What does that mean?" Sullivan asked.

"We're about to complete..." the Interrogator began.

"Sir. I beg of you," Sully pleaded, "I make appeal that..."

"--Appeal?" The Interrogator asked. "Mr. Chairman the witness is making an appeal."

"The charge of this Committee has been to set the record. The record will stand," the Chairman decreed.

"The record?" Sully repeated to himself. "Perhaps you didn't understand me. Can't you make a motion to IMPROVE things? My God, who's going to even READ the record? Can't you DO something?"

"The Record will stand," the Chairman began, "This then will be the FINAL judgment." He banged the gavel once and closed the proceedings.

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